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ABSTRACT

The characteristics common to 571 public secondary schools that have been recognized as exemplary as part of the "Secondary School Recognition Program" are described in this booklet. Descriptions are given of: (1) good principals; (2) good teachers; (3) teacher rewards and recognition; (4) good student-teacher relationships; (5) high expectations; (6) successful problem solving; (7) parent and community involvement; and (8) school goals. (JD)

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GOOD SECONDARY SCHOOLS

WHAT MAKES THEM TICK?

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Eight years ago Dixie Hollins High School was torn apart by racial tension and low teacher and student morale. Fights and demonstrations made newspaper headlines every day. Learning was secondary. Disruptions dominated the school day. Today, that's all changed. The focus is on academics instead of riots. Teacher and student morale is up. School pride abounds. Dixie Hollins is now a model school and a winner of the Department of Education's Secondary School Recognition Program.

–Dixie Hollins High School
St. Petersburg, Florida
1983–1984 Recognition Winner

Introduction

All parents want their children to attend good schools. But what is a "good" school?

The U.S. Department of Education decided to find out. So it studied 571 exemplary public secondary schools that it previously had cited for excellence as part of the "Secondary School Recognition Program." The Department has honored these schools since 1982 as shining examples of what American schools can become.

What makes these schools work? For starters, they all have strong principals and good teachers, according to the Department's study, "The Search for Successful Secondary Schools."*

* The study was conducted under contract by Thomas Corcoran and Bruce Wilson at Research for Better Schools in Philadelphia.

Good secondary schools—middle, junior high, and high schools—are vital and dynamic. They have an identity. They pursue clear goals. They tackle obstacles that might deter others. They set high standards, which they take risks to meet.

Excellent teaching conditions allow these schools to draw talented, dedicated staffs. They create caring, positive environments for their students and encourage adults and adolescents to work in harmony. They invite the community to use the school and in turn ask the community for its support.

Although exemplary schools share many traits, they are far from identical. Some have long-standing reputations for excellence; others, like Dixie Hollins, were recently transformed. Some are urban schools, some suburban, some rural. Some are big (the largest of those recognized houses almost 4,000 students); some are small (the tiniest educates just 64). Some serve wealthy neighborhoods; others are in ghettos.

Good schools face the same problems many schools do: inadequate facilities, declining enrollments, not enough money. Many have large low-income or minority student populations.

Any school, despite the hurdles, can strive for excellence. The authors hope this study can help them do so. We owe it to this country's students to make all our schools good. Parents, teachers, administrators, and school board members can do their part by helping their schools develop the eight characteristics described in the following pages.

Mara Clisby had her hands full when she took over Artesia High School. Artesia's reputation was bad. It was filled with gangs. One-fourth of the students were absent on any given day. Test scores were low. Mara Clisby laid down the law right off the bat: No more gang fights. She moved her desk into the girls' bathroom and held meetings and counseling there, just to stay visible. She convinced teachers to ask more of students. She convinced students to ask more of themselves. It worked. The gang problems disappeared. Average daily attendance rose to 99 percent. Eighty percent of the students now go to college compared with 54 percent before. Artesia High School is now a good school.

–Artesia High School
Lakewood, California
1983–1984 Recognition Winner

1. Good Principals

Exemplary schools have principals like Mara Clisby, who know what it takes to get the job done and aren't afraid to do it. Successful principals are innovative, enthusiastic, creative, and knowledgeable. They often are the major factor in their schools' success.

Good principals nurture and encourage others to be leaders. They trust others–

department heads, members of school improvement committees or advisory councils, and respected teachers—with important responsibilities.

Good principals are committed to the students' welfare and work to create the best possible conditions for them. Students, in turn, trust and respect them.

Good principals care about their teachers. They create the best possible working conditions for them. They allow teachers a role in school planning while never forgetting their responsibility as the ultimate leader. They know when to pull in the reins and "be tough," when to loosen up and share their leadership.

Good principals work successfully with students, teachers, parents, and school board members. Although each group wants what's best for the students, they often disagree about what that is or how to provide it. A good principal serves as the final gatekeeper or decisionmaker when conflicts develop among members of the school community.

Principals lead their schools in various ways. No one leadership style dominates. Some principals are dynamic and powerful, others low-key. What matters most is that the principal's style fits the school's needs.

"It's not a job to us. It's our life. Ineffective teachers can't survive here–the pressure to be good is intense. You want to measure up to your colleagues."

–Homewood High School teacher
Homewood, Alabama
1983–1984 Recognition Winner

2. Good Teachers

An exemplary school has good teachers who maintain order in the classroom, know their subject well, and successfully get it across to students.

Many schools are able to recruit fine teachers but can't retain them. Successful schools manage to keep them for several reasons. Good schools offer competitive salaries. They provide comfortable working conditions. They give teachers a sense of belonging by allowing them some say about what happens in the school. They treat them with personal and professional respect.

When teachers at Westchester Middle School in Chesterton, Indiana, were asked who made most of the important decisions in the school, they said, "We do." They also can leave the school during their planning period. "Good teachers plan all the time," the principal says, "so, why should they have to do it for 48 minutes between 10 and 11 a.m.? They'll be better teachers if they can use that time to go to the bank and make the deposit they need to cover the mortgage payment. I just treat them like the adults they are." Although such an option may not always be

feasible, all schools can treat teachers with respect and trust.

The physical condition of a school affects teachers. The age of the building is less important than how well it's maintained. Teachers want to feel safe and secure and to have usable and sufficient work space.

Students recognize good teaching. In fact, most students at outstanding schools were quick to point out that the teachers made their schools good.

"One would have a hard time not feeling appreciated and recognized in this school. Everybody recognizes everyone all the time. Teachers get the same types of motivational rewards and incentives as do the students. Recognition and compliments are a regular daily occurrence at this school."

–Gans High School visitor
Muldrow, Oklahoma
1983–1984 Recognition Winner

3. Teacher Rewards and Recognition

Teachers, like everyone else, enjoy being recognized for a job well done. When something in a class goes wrong–if a student is disruptive or scores poorly on a math test–teachers say they are held responsible. However, when things go well–if test scores rise or the school wins an award–they complain about being ignored.

Good schools constantly recognize their teachers, both formally and informally. At Westchester Middle School in Chesterton, Indiana, the principal frequently writes short notes to teachers, thanking them for something special they have done. Many times the "thank you" comes for something the teacher wasn't aware had been noticed.

Successful schools make sure teachers are recognized by constantly encouraging students, parents and other teachers to praise good teaching. Seniors at some schools honor special teachers by reading their names aloud

at graduation. And principals often encourage parents to compliment teachers for their successes.

Teachers say the most important acknowledgment comes from colleagues. In some schools even peer recognition is not left to chance. For example, staff at Metro Secondary School in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, discuss positive accomplishments at weekly meetings. Teachers praise each other for exemplary teaching or for effectively working with a difficult student.

Some schools offer teachers more tangible awards, such as merit pay, stipends for professional development, or promotions to team leader or curriculum coordinator.

Rewards, no matter what the form, help motivate teachers to go that extra mile for their students.

"Teachers respect students here and with that respect comes friendship. No teacher would turn you down if you went for help."
–Louis E. Dieruff High School student
Allentown, Pennsylvania
1984–1985 Recognition Award

4. Good Student-Teacher Relationships

Students and adults in successful schools get along with each other. Consequently, students in exemplary schools are motivated to work harder than those in less successful ones.

It can be hard for secondary school teachers supervising 100 to 150 students each day to get to know them. But if a school is to be successful, teachers and students must have positive, personal relationships. Such relationships don't just happen. Teachers and principals must work at making them happen. In successful schools, they do.

Principals in many excellent secondary schools encourage teachers to work closely with their students in the classroom, in extracurricular activities, and even in community projects outside of schools.

Some schools give teachers offices or work places where they can meet with individual students or small groups. Others may have teacher-advisor programs where each teacher works with 10 to 15 students.

Good schools give teachers time and opportunities to work with students. For example, English teachers at Clayton High School in

Clayton, Missouri, are assigned only three classes. During the remainder of the day they meet with students one-on-one to discuss the five or six major compositions required each semester.

These relationships let students know teachers care about both their academic achievements and their personal well-being. In fact, students in successful schools say there's always someone with whom they can discuss problems.

Good schools use extracurricular activities to bring teachers and students together outside the classroom. Such activities provide students with opportunities to plan and organize, play leadership roles, gain recognition for their skills and achievements, and learn social skills.

In many good schools as many as 90 percent of the students take part in extracurricular activities, significantly above the participation rate in an average secondary school. Some schools believe these activities are so important that students who can't find a club suited to their interests are invited to start one. School-sponsored clubs can range from chess to juggling to scuba diving to sailing.

Such clubs can motivate youngsters in the classroom. A student at Shaker Heights High School near Cleveland was a D student before joining the drama club, where he got "turned on" to English. His grade point average rose to a B+, and he advanced to honors English and science classes.

Good student-teacher relationships are essential in helping both students and teachers conquer the monotony of daily school schedules and sustain their drive for excellence.

"I moved to Eastmont School from another place. In my old school, teachers told me I was no good, worthless, and never going to amount to anything. When I started the same behavior pattern in the new school, a teacher pulled me aside and said, 'Look, we don't behave like that here.' That saved my life, because they never told me I was worthless."

–Eastmont Middle School student
Sandy, Utah
1983–1985 Recognition Award

5. High Expectations

All students can learn; it just takes more to motivate some than others. Excellent schools foster a "can do" attitude; principals and teachers expect a lot of all students and make it their responsibility to motivate kids. They're also willing to give a pat on the back when it's deserved.

Many schools hailed today for academic achievement were once mediocre. They expected little of their students and made excuses for their lack of achievement. Today, these schools push all students to their highest potential. And the boys and girls know they're being pushed. For example, a student at American High School in Hialeah, Florida, says, "Teachers are on you all the time to do better. Even when you think you are working hard, they expect you to keep improving. They keep adjusting the goals upward."

This school makes learning its number one priority. Four years ago students were allowed to complete their own schedules and take courses that met minimal requirements. That's not so today. Counselors and teachers help them choose classes that push them academically.

Jamaica High School in Jamaica, New York, turned the focus on academics by establishing seven different subject "institutions" where students concentrate on an academically rigorous area, such as math or science. The school believes its students will prosper when high standards are set. Students in the Finance Institute, for example, learn accounting, Wall Street operations, law, banking, computer programming, and have a summer internship between their junior and senior years.

Schools that push students also reward them. Northview High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for instance, honors all its students with at least a "B" average at an honors convocation. Special awards are given to seniors with a B+ or better average. More than 700 parents and friends fill the neighborhood church where the ceremony is held.

Informal means of recognition also are important. Whenever a student earns a place on the honor roll, is elected to an office, or earns a post on an athletic team, the school sends a note to the student's home.

Academic halls of fame get as much attention as sports halls of fame in many exemplary schools. Perhaps nothing symbolizes the changing climate in American public education better than high schools which now print the names of their honor roll students on all of their sports programs.

When Robert Eicholtz took over as principal of Pioneer High School, the school grounds were littered with everything from paper to cans and bottles. It was a mess. Undaunted, Mr. Eicholtz had students turn the trash to treasure by recycling it. At the end of the year, their recycling venture earned them enough money for an all-expense paid trip to Knotts Berry Farm and a beautification award presented by the local Chamber of Commerce, the first time this award was given to a school.

–Pioneer High School
Whittier, California
1982–1983 Recognition Winner

6. Solving Problems

Good schools don't exist in a charmed bubble. They face the same problems other schools do: declining enrollments, not enough money, and inadequate facilities. But the good schools don't sit back and wait for answers to appear. They view problems as opportunities and aggressively search for solutions.

Faculty and students at Byng High School in Ada, Oklahoma, built a showcase school with almost no resources. The school is in a poor district with a large minority population. But vocational students and the maintenance staff built the facility on donated land with materials purchased on sale.

A visitor to the school said, "One quickly forgets when entering the grounds that this is a poor school. The teachers and students don't think of themselves as poor, they think of themselves as resourceful."

When Southwood Junior High School in Miami, Florida, faced declining enrollments, it created a Center for the Arts that provides a diversified program in art, drama, dance, music, and photography. It was so successful that student enrollment rose by 25 percent.

Like all schools, good schools have their problem students. But teachers, a counselor, and the assistant principal at Linn-Mar High School in Marion, Iowa, put their heads together to find ways to help them. A student assessment team meets regularly to brainstorm ideas on how better to reach individual students. They try to determine why a student isn't achieving or how a student can be motivated. Teachers who work successfully with a difficult student share their techniques with the student's other teachers. A follow-up conference is held to check on these students' progress.

Naval Junior ROTC Lt. Commander James H. Ryan believes a sailor belongs on the water every once in awhile. So, Ryan's ROTC students at John A. Holmes High School in Edenton, North Carolina, now have their own 39-ton, 65-foot boat named America II, thanks to a U.S. Congressman, the school superintendent, and the Maritime Administration. The patrol boat, which serves as a floating classroom, was donated by the Merchant Marines. Since then, the community has rallied around America II. Welders, carpenters, pipefitters, plumbers, and electricians help with the upkeep. Businesses donate money for materials such as radio equipment and fiberglass. When the young sailors from John Holmes diligently navigate through the waters of Albemarle Sound, it's difficult to tell who is prouder—the townspeople or the students.

—John A. Holmes High School
Edenton, North Carolina
1984–1985 Recognition Winner

7. Parent and Community Involvement

Educators often remark that it is hard to get parents involved, particularly in junior

high and high schools. However, quite the opposite is true in good schools because they don't wait for the community to come to them—they go to the community.

Many exemplary schools recruit volunteers—parents as well as non-parents—to be clerks or nurses' assistants, to teach, to tutor, or to help plan special school activities. Twin Peaks Middle School reached out to retired people in Poway, California, with a Grandpeople Program. The retirees teach art, science, reading, and spelling. They help small groups build special products in shop. Most importantly, they become confidants of the youngsters. The result? The volunteers report a revitalization in their own lives, and students have learned to be more courteous and caring.

Good schools also work with parents to develop aggressive public relations campaigns. Parents in Lincoln, Nebraska, made a videotape to tell the high school's story to community groups.

Instead of hiding crises from the community, good schools turn to it for help. For example, when Lakeside High School in Atlanta, Georgia, was desegregated, the school asked citizens to help deal with fears and concerns about the change in student population. Meetings and open houses were held in neighborhood homes and in the school, and truth squads and rumor clinics were established.

Community businesses have supported student athletics for a long time. Good schools successfully seek out similar support for academic activities. Cincinnati, Ohio, residents contributed more than $400,000 last year to the School for Creative and Performing Arts, a magnet school. More than 200,000 people have attended its performances.

Model schools don't just "take" from the community; they give in return. Students visit local nursing homes or help raise money for charity through bike-a-thons and other ac-

tivities. Roosevelt-Lincoln Junior High School in Salina, Kansas, sends student musical ambassadors into the community several times a year; other students officiate at the Special Olympics and take part in an Adopt-a-Grandparent program.

These activities may not differ from those in other secondary schools. What is different is that they occur more often, involve more people, and are valued more by school leaders.

Academics. Attitude. Athletics. Artistry. Those are the goals at Chula Vista High School. These four A's of excellence are extolled everywhere, all the time at the school. They are stressed in letters to parents and students and are discussed with students during assemblies. Each week students are cited for excellence in academics, attitude, athletics, or artistry. Teachers display posters emphasizing the four A's. Excellence is constantly stressed in all phases of school life.

–Chula Vista High School
Chula Vista, California
1983–1984 Recognition Winner

8. School Goals

Many schools have goals. In fact, the goals in successful schools often are no different from those in their less successful counterparts. But model schools discuss their goals–constantly. Everybody–parents, teachers, students, and community members–knows what the school's goals are. They are taken seriously and are reflected in everything the schools do.

Teachers and community members in Colville, Washington, developed the high school's goals. These form the basis for all major curriculum decisions and are reviewed annually. Students know what the goals are, and the principal discusses them in a weekly news-

paper column and a quarterly newsletter to parents.

These goals come alive because the schools are committed to them. Teachers and principals ask questions: Are the students learning what they're supposed to? Is the English Department meeting its goals? Good schools are flexible and willing to revise goals to meet changing needs of students.

Schools often are pressured to be all things to all people—an impossible task. Setting goals mollifies some of that pressure and lets a school focus on what it wants to accomplish.

Goals alone will not bring success to a school. They must be accompanied by action. Clayton High School in Clayton, Missouri, is well known for its exceptional programs for bright students. But the principal wanted quality programs for *all* his students. The school developed a chemistry class, "Chemistry for the Other Half," which has received national recognition. A full-time counselor was brought in to work with no more than 15 students at a time. A new work-study program and a training program were started to help teachers work more effectively with students needing extra help.

If we focus on failure, we might get it. And if we focus on success, we might get it."
–William J. Bennett
U.S. Secretary of Education

Good schools exist all over America. Each of the 571 schools cited as outstanding has successfully pursued excellence and equity in education. Each also has adapted policies and practices to meet its unique needs. These exemplary schools are not exactly alike because there is no one correct way to run a school.

We know what makes these schools tick: good principals, good teachers, rewards and recognition for teachers, positive student-teacher relationships, high expectations, willingness to solve problems, and clear goals.

It sounds like a simple formula to carry out. But striving for excellence requires sustained effort and commitment. Shortcuts do not exist. The authors of "The Search for Successful Secondary Schools" hope this study can make the task easier by helping school and community leaders, teachers, parents, students and policymakers ask the right questions: Do our schools have clear goals? What kind of principal do we have? Do our schools encourage positive relationships between teachers and students? Do we expect a lot of students?

Asking questions like these is the first step toward replicating the success stories found in "The Search for Successful Secondary Schools."

Ordering Information

Copies of "The Search for Successful Secondary Schools" can be obtained from the Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. 20402. When ordering, refer to GPO Stock Number 065-000-00-270-1, and include a check or money order for $8.50, made payable to the Government Printing Office.

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